

North Country National Scenic Trail
“TAILGATE SAFETY SERIES”



DRIVING SAFETY

Driving is one of the most hazardous tasks that we perform. Because of the fact that we perform the task so frequently in the course of our daily lives we tend to take it for granted. How tragic would it be to complete a trail work assignment after safely using a variety of tools in an outdoor environment, only to incur a driving-related injury on the way home? Vehicle operators need to keep a “Safety First” frame of mind, even after the day’s project is completed. Strive to develop or improve upon defensive driving techniques.

- A good starting point is attitude. A positive attitude toward improving your defensive driving skills will assist you in developing good defensive driving habits. It is important to remember that a bad habit is as easy to develop as a good habit. Are you training yourself to do the right things the right way, like fastening your seat belt, checking your mirrors, securing tools and equipment properly, and maintaining safe following distances?
- Incorporate driving safety into the work planning process. If trail workers will have a substantial drive home, the final work day of a project (or even a single-day project that has been physically tasking) should allow for early release in order to minimize fatigue and enhance safe driving practices.
- Inattentiveness is a major contributing factor in motor vehicle accidents. Driving is a common component in our lives, but it requires 100% of our attention. There are many forms of inattentive driving; fatigue, daydreaming, eating, drinking, reading, writing, and talking. Here are some techniques for maintaining your attention while driving:
 - Drive only when you are well rested and alert, and take a 10 to 15 minute break after every two hours of driving
 - Practice situational awareness when driving; be aware of what is happening in front, behind, and on both sides of your vehicle
 - Never drive if taking medications that make you drowsy
 - Avoid using cell phones, GPS units, computers or other similar devices while driving—have a passenger operate them, or pull over and park
 - By constantly moving your vision—checking mirrors and distant road conditions—you can avoid highway hypnosis and daydreaming

- Avoid eating or drinking while driving—perform these activities during frequent breaks
 - Do not attempt to read maps or write directions while driving
 - Avoid becoming impatient or agitated while driving, it only magnifies inattentive driving behaviors
- Remember that safe driving starts with a safe vehicle. Something as simple as underinflated tires can have serious consequences. Get in the habit of doing a pre-operation inspection of your vehicle before driving.

References:

Six Minutes for Safety, http://www.nifc.gov/sixminutes/dsp_sixminutes.php